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E.O. 11652* GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PGOV, TH
SUBJ: KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT ROUNDS OUT FIRST SIX MONTHS IN OFFICE

SUMMARY: THE KRIANGSAK CABINET IS ROUNDING OUT SIX MONTHS
IN OFFICE. ALTHOUGH PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK IS CLEARLY THE
LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT, HE HAS HAD TO ACCEPT LIMITS TO HIS
POWER TO ACT, INVOLVING HIS POSITION WITHIN THE THAI MILITARY,
THE INTRACTABLE ECONOMIC AND LABOR PROBLEMS FACING THAILAND,
AND THE VERY CONSERVATIVE NATURE OF THAI SOCIETY. IN ADDITION,
KRIANGSAK MUST FIND A NEW POLITICAL BASE FOR HIS POWER AFTER
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HE REACHES MANDATORY RETIREMENT AGE FROM THE THAI MILITARY
SERVICE ON SEPT 30, 1978. WHILE KRIANGSAK MADE AN INITIALLY
FAVORABLE IMPRESSION ON MOST THAI, THE HONEYMOON PERIOD
IS OVER, AND A LESS ENCOURAGING ECONOMIC SITUATION WILL
HAVE ITS IMPACT JUST AT THE TIME WHEN THE ELECTIONS CAM-
PAIGN IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN. THE SECOND SIX MONTHS FOR
THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT PROMISE TO BE MORE CHALLENGING

THAN THE FIRST SIX MONTHS. END SUMMARY.

1. INSTALLED IN OFFICE BY THE BLOODLESS COUP D'ETAT OF OCT 20, 1977, THE CABINET OF PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK CHAMANAN IS ROUNDING OUT ITS FIRST SIX MONTHS IN OFFICE. THE CABINET, AS SUCH, WAS APPOINTED BY THE KING ON NOVEMBER 12, 1977, BUT KRIANGSAK WAS THE PRINCIPAL INFLUENCE BEHIND THE OCTOBER COUP AND HAS DOMINATED EVENTS SINCE THEN.

2. HOWEVER, ALTHOUGH KRIANGSAK IS CLEARLY THE LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT, HE HAS HAD TO ACCEPT LIMITS TO HIS POWER AND HIS ABILITY TO ACT. THESE LIMITS INVOLVE THE MILITARY GROUP THAT MADE THE COUP, THE INTRACTABLE ECONOMIC AND LABOR PROBLEMS WHICH THAILAND FACES, AND THE CONSERVATIVE NATURE OF THAI SOCIETY. AS HE LOOKS TO THE FUTURE, KRIANGSAK MUST FIND A NEW POLITICAL BASE FOR HIS POWER AFTER HE RETIRES FROM MILITARY SERVICE IN SEPTEMBER, 1978.

3. SITUATION IN THE THAI MILITARY - KRIANGSAK IS NOT THE KIND OF MILITARY LEADER THAILAND HAS HAD IN THE PAST, SUCH AS FIELD MARSHALS PHIBUN, SARIT, OR THANOM. HE IS NOT AND NEVER HAS BEEN THE DOMINANT FIGURE IN THE THAI MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT, AND HIS PURELY MILITARY INFLUENCE, THOUGH IT IS VERY SUBSTANTIAL, WILL DECLINE AS HE MOVES CLOSER TO MANDATORY RETIREMENT ON SEPT 30, 1978. THIS IS NOT TO SUGGEST THAT KRIANGSAK FACES A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO HIS POSITION.

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SITUATION AS PRIME MINISTER FROM A MILITARY RIVAL IN THE NEAR FUTURE. HE IS PRIME MINISTER UNDER A CLEARLY INTERIM APPOINTMENT BY THE KING UNTIL NATIONAL ELECTIONS ARE HELD BY THE END OF 1978 OR, AT LATEST, BY APRIL, 1979. ALTHOUGH HE WILL RETIRE AS SUPREME COMMANDER OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMED FORCES ON SEPT 30, HE WILL HAVE A MAJOR VOICE IN DESIGNATING HIS REPLACEMENT. THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY, WHICH DOMINATES THE THAI MILITARY, GEN. SOEM NU NAKHON, IS AN APOLITICAL CAREER OFFICER WHO DOES NOT REACH MANDATORY RETIREMENT AGE UNTIL SEPT 30, 1981.

4. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THERE IS NO INDIVIDUAL CURRENTLY BEING CONSIDERED IN POLITICAL CIRCLES IN THAILAND AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO KRIANGSAK AS PRIME MINISTER. A THREAT TO KRIANGSAK'S POSITION MIGHT BE POSED BY GEN YOT THEPHASADIN NA AYUTTHAYA, CURRENTLY DEPUTY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY. YOT HAS SPENT MOST OF HIS CAREER AS A TROOP LEADER, HAS INFLUENCE WITH KEY REGIMENTAL AND BATTALION COMMANDERS, AND HAS ACCESS TO CONSIDERABLE MONEY, REPORTEDLY LARGELY FROM FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT. THE BANGKOK RUMOR MILL HAS CONTINUALLY MENTIONED YOT AS A POSSIBLE LEADER OF A COUP AGAINST KRIANGSAK. KRIANGSAK IS

CLEARLY AWARE OF THE RUMORS BUT BELIEVES THAT NO POTENTIAL RIVAL IS IN A POSITION TO MOUNT A COUP AGAINST HIM AT THIS TIME. HOWEVER, EVIDENTLY AS A PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE, HE HAS TAKEN YOT WITH HIM ON HIS VISITS TO THE ASEAN COUNTRIES AND TO CHINA, A CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH HAS OCCASIONAL IRONICAL COMMENT IN CARTOONS CARRIED IN BANGKOK'S STILL RELATIVELY DOCILE PRESS. OUR ASSESSMENT IS THAT YOT HAS NO INTEREST AT THIS TIME IN CHALLENGING KRIANGSAK FOR THE POST OF PRIME MINISTER BUT WANTS TO MAINTAIN A SENIOR POSITION IN THE GOVERNMENT TO PROTECT HIS BUSINESS INTERESTS, ON WHICH HE SPENDS MOST OF HIS TIME. YOT REACHES MANDATORY RETIREMENT AGE ON SEPT 30, 1978, ALONG WITH KRIANGSAK. SOME MEANS MIGHT HAVE TO BE FOUND TO PROVIDE YOT WITH AN ACCEPTABLE POSITION IN THE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AFTER HIS RETIREMENT. KRIANGSAK OBVIOUSLY BELIEVES THAT

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YOT MUST BE CAREFULLY HANDLED.

5. THERE HAVE BEEN INDICATIONS OF COOLING RELATIONS BETWEEN KRIANGSAK AND RETIRED ADMIRAL SA-NGAT CHALOYU, CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL POLICY COUNCIL, WHICH INCLUDES ALL OF THE SURVIVING LEADERS OF THE 1976 AND 1977 COUPS. MOREOVER, THERE IS EVIDENCE OF A COOLNESS TOWARDS KRIANGSAK ON THE PART OF OTHER MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL POLICY COUNCIL, WHICH COLLECTIVELY HOLDS VERY LARGE INFLUENCE IN THE THAI POLITY. UNDER THE INTERIM CONSTITUTION THE NPC HAS AUTHORITY TO REQUIRE THE RESIGNATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER. INFLUENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE NPC ARE KNOWN TO BE CRITICAL OF KRIANGSAK'S MODERATE STANCE IN ACCEPTING INDOCHINESE REFUGEES INTO THAILAND AND HIS RELATIVELY FLEXIBLE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE DEMANDS OF THAI LABOR. IN ADDITION, KRIANGSAK HAS FOLLOWED A PATTERN OF REFERRING FEW POLICY ISSUES TO THE NPC, HANDLING MOST MATTERS WITHIN THE CABINET. WITH SA-NGAT'S DEPARTURE ON APRIL 18 ON A SIX-WEEKS' PURCHASING MISSION ABROAD, IT APPEARS THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN KRIANGSAK AND THE NPC ARE NOT IN A CRITICAL CONDITION. HOWEVER, NPC ATTITUDES REPRESENT A CONTINUING, CRITICAL CONSTRAINT ON HIS POSITION.

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6. A FURTHER, PURPORTED THREAT TO KRIANGSAK'S POSITION IS THE RUMORED MACHINATIONS OF FORMER DEPTUY PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIAN, WHO WAS OUSTED IN OCT, 1973, BUT RETURNED TO THAILAND IN DEC 1976. PRAPHAT HAS BEEN WIDELY RUMORED TO BE THE MAIN FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR GENERAL YOT AND REPORTEDLY WISHES TO EXPAND HIS RANGE OF POLITICAL INFLUENCE. PRAPHAT'S INTEREST IN SUPPORTING YOT IS PROBABLY RELATED TO HIS DESIRE TO HAVE THE GOVERNMENT RETURN TO HIM THE PROPERTY AND RESOURCES WHICH WERE CONFISCATED FROM HIM AND HIS WIFE, THANPUYING SAWAI, BY THE SANYA GOVERNMENT IN 1973, ON THE GROUNDS THAT THEY WERE IMPROPERLY
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ACQUIRED. THESE RESOURCES ARE VALUED AT AROUND US \$13.5 MILLION. PROSPECTS FOR A LEGAL RETURN OF THESE ASSETS APPEAR POOR, AS THE THAI SUPREME COURT HAS REJECTED CLAIMS FOR THE RETURN OF ASSETS CONFISCATED IN 1973. ONLY DIRECT ACTION BY THE PRIME MINISTER COULD BRING ABOUT A RETURN OF THESE ASSETS. KRIANGSAK HAS TAKEN NO POSITION ON THE RETURN OF THESE ASSETS. BEYOND HIS CONCERN OVER THE RETURN OF HIS SEIZED PROPERTY, PRAPHAT IS A CONFIRMED POLITICAL TACTICIAN WHO ENJOYS USING HIS INFLUENCE AMONG POLITICAL GROUPS AND IN THE ARMY TO DABBLE IN THE POLITICAL POT.

7. THERE ARE REPORTS FROM TIME TO TIME OF DISSATISFACTION AT MIDDLE LEVELS OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY. HOWEVER, AT THIS POINT THERE APPEARS TO BE LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT SUCH DISSATISFACTION AS EXISTS WILL POSE AN EARLY THREAT TO THE REGIME. KRIANGSAK HAS WORKED CAREFULLY TO KEEP HIS CHANNELS OPEN TO FIELD-GRADE OFFICERS WHO OPENLY EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO THE THANIN GOVERNMENT. KRIANGSAK DOES NOT HAVE THE KIND OF LOYALTY FROM THE FIELD-GRADE OFFICERS WHICH OTHER THAI LEADERS OF THE PAST HAVE HAD. HOWEVER, HE DOES APPEAR TO HAVE THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND A EMASURE OF SUPPORT, ENSURING HIM AGAINST A MOVE DIRECTED AT REPLACING HIM AND HIS GOVERNMENT.

8. ECONOMIC AND LABOR SITUATION - THE EMERGIN ECONOMIC AND LABOR SITUATION APPEARS TO PRESENT MORE INTRACTABLE AND DIFFICULT PROBLEMS FOR KRIANGSAK THAN THOSE IN THE MILITARY AREA. A PERIOD OF RELATIVE PRICE STABILITY AND LOW RATES OF INFLATION, AS STRONG TRADING POSITION FOR THAILAND, AND LABOR QUIET HAVE GIVEN WAY TO A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY IN ALL THREE AREAS OF THE ECONOMY.

9. THE LIMITED INCREASE IN PETROLEUM PRICES APPROVED BY THE THANIN GOVERNMENT I MARCH, 1977, AND THE LARGER INCONFIDENTIAL

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CREASE APPROVED BY THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT IN FEBRUARY, 1978, HAVE BEGUN TO WORK THEIR WAY THROUGH THE ECONOMY AND HAVE RAISED THE PROSPECTS FOR INFLATION AT A RATE OF 10-12 PERCENT IN 1978. A SLOW BUT STEADY INCREASE IN GENERAL PRICES, CONSEQUENT ON THE PETROLEUM PRICE INCREASE AND ON THE SHARP INCREASE IN IMPORT DUTIES ON CERTAIN "LUXURY" GOODS APPROVED IN FEBRUARY, 1978, HAS INCRESDED RESTIVENESS IN IN THE THAI LABOR MOVEMENT, WHICH WILL BE EXAMINED MORE FULLY BELWO.

10. THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT ENCOUNTERED A RECORD TRADE DEFICIT FOR 1977 AMOUNTING TO CLOSE TO US DOLS 1.0 BILLION. THIS TRADE DEFICIT, REFLECTING SHARPLY RISING IMPORTS (AND ESPECIALLY OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS, WHICH ACCOUNT FOR ABOUT 25 PERCENT OF THAI IMPORTS BY VALUE), AND A DECLINE IN THE VALUE OF CERTAIN THAI EXPORTS SUCH AS RICE AND SUGAR, FOLLOWS A PERIOD OF STRENGTH IN 1975-76, WHEN THAILAND'S BALANCE OF TRADE AND OF PAYMENTS WERE IN PARTICULARLY GOOD CONDITION.

11. IN THE RELATIVELY SHORT TERM, APART FROM INCREASING IMPORT DUTIES (A DOUBLE-EDGED WEAPON) AND PROMOTING EXPORTS (OF UNCERTAIN UTILITY, AS THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET DETERMINES THE PRICES AND HENCE THE OVERALL RETURN), THE MOST PROMISING MEANS OF RIGHTING THE TRADE AND BALANCE OF PAYMENTS POSITION IS TO PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT OF THAI NATURAL

RESOURCES. THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT HAS RAFFIRMED THE THANIN GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO DEVELOP THE NATURAL GAS DEPOSITS IN THE GULF OF THAILAND AND THE MINERAL RESOURCES IN THE NORTH AND NORTHEAST, AND TO CONSTRUCT THE PORT, PIPE-LINE, AND RAILWAY INFRASTRUCTURE WHICH THE PETROLEUM AND MINERAL PROJECTS WILL MAKE NECESSARY. OF THESE, THE GAS PIPELINE PROJECT--ESTIMATED TO COST AT LEAST US DOLS 200 MILLION -- HAS ADVANCED FARTHEST AND PRESUMABLY WILL MOVE FORWARD SWIFTLY, ONCE THE NEGOTIATIONS ON THE PRICE OF GAS ARE COMPLETED. (THE OIL COMPANIES HAVE SET A TARGET
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DATE OF JULY 1, 1978.) THERE HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITY IN THE PLANNING PHASE FOR CONSTRUCTION OF A US DOLS 120 MILLION SODA ASH PLANT, BASED ON ROCK SALT RESERVES IN THE NORTHEAST (THIS IS THE RTG'S ASEAN PROJECT). A NEW DEEP-WATER PORT AT BAN LAEM CHABANG (SOUTEAST OF BANGKOK) AND A RAILWAY TO SERVE THE PORT AND THE ROCK SALT DEPOSITS ARE UNDER STUDY.

12. HOWEVER, TO DATE ACTUAL PROGRESS MADE ON THESE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS PROJECTS HAS TAKEN PLACE AT A PACE LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM THAT DURING THE PERIOD OF THE THANIN GOVERNMENT. THE FULL IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT OF THAI PETROLEUM AND MINERAL RESOURCES ON THE THAI TRADING POSITION WILL NOT BE FELT UNTIL 1983 AT THE EARLIEST. ON THE OTHER HAND, TIME REMAINS FOR KRIANGSAK TO IMPROVE DRAMATICALLY THE IMAGE OF HIS GOVERNMENT IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE, PRIMARILY THROUGH REACHING AGREEMENT SOON WITH THE UNION OIL AND TEXAS PACIFIC COMPANIES ON THE WELLHEAD GAS PRICE. ONCE THIS BOTTLENECK IS BROKEN, THIS MAJOR PROJECT CAN MOVE FORWARD AND PROVIDE NOT ONLY MAJOR IMPETUS TO THE THAI ECONOMY BUT ALSO EXTREMELY USEFUL PSYCHOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EVIDENCE THAT THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT HAS EXHIBITED DECISIVE LEADERSHIP. INDEED, THE NEED FOR CAMPAIGN AMMUNITION COULD INFLUNENCE KRIANGSAK TO FORCE AN EARLY DECISION ON THE NATURAL GAS PROJECT.

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13. KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT AND ORGANIZED LABOR - AFTER THE OCT 20TH COUP, THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT MOVED DELIBERATELY TO RELAX SOME RESTRICTIONS ON LABOR UNIONS AND MEET SOME OF ORGANIZED LABOR'S MORE PRESSING DEMANDS. IT RE-

AFFIRMED THE RIGHT OF STATE ENTERPRISE WORKERS TO UNIONIZE, PERMITTED LABOR UNIONS TO RESUME REGULAR MEETINGS, ALLOWED FOREIGN LABOR ASSISTANCE ORGANIZATIONS TO HOLD LABOR SEMINARS, AND OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED THE LABOR CONGRESS OF THAILAND (LCT), THAILAND'S FIRST BROADLY-BASED LABOR UNION FEDERATION. PHAISAN THAWATCHAINAN IS THE LEADER OF
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THE LCT, AS HE WAS OF ITS PREDECESSOR, THE CONFEDERATION OF LABOR UNIONS OF THAILAND (CLUT), DISSOLVED AFTER THE 1976 COUP. NEVERTHELESS, THE NEW RTG MAINTAINED THE MARTIAL LAW BAN ON STRIKES AND PUBLICLY ENDORSED THE EXISTING PROHIBITION ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY LABOR LEADERS.

14. LEADERS OF ORGANIZED LABOR HAVE THUS FAR SUPPORTED THE PRIME MINISTER AND APPROVED THE GENERAL DIRECTION OF RTG LABOR POLICY. AT THE SAME TIME MANY EXPRESS MISGIVINGS OVER THE SLOW PACE AND LIMITED SCOPE OF THE RELAXATION OF RESTRICTIONS. IN PARTICULAR THEY WANT THE RTG TO LIFT THE MARTIAL LAW BAN ON STRIKES, A MOVE WHICH MOST LABOR LEADERS

VIEW AS A PREREQUISITE FOR THE RESUMPTION OF MEANINGFUL COLLECTIVE BARGAINING. GIVEN THE RELATIVE RIGIDITY IN WAGES SINCE OCT, 1976, AND THE IMPACT OF AN ANNUAL RATE OF 10 TO 12 PERCENT INFLATION ON REAL INCOME, MANY LABOR LEADERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE LARGE STATE ENTERPRISES, FEEL UNDER CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM THE RANK AND FILE TO PUSH FOR SIGNIFICANT WAGE INCREASES.

15. AT PRESENT, ORGANIZED LABOR NEEDS A STANCE OF MILITANCY AND STRIKES TO MAINTAIN LABOR MORALE, TO PROVIDE A FOCUS FOR EXPANSION OF MEMBERSHIP, AND TO PERMIT PHAISAN TO STAY AHEAD OF HIS RIVALS IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT.

16. IN RECENT WEEKS THERE HAS BEEN A MARKED INCREASE IN LABOR UNION ACTIVITY AS WELL AS LABOR UNREST. THE LABOR CONGRESS OF THAILAND (LCT) HAS SUBMITTED A FIVE-POINT PROPOSAL TO THE RTG CALLING FOR A 60 PERCENT INCREASE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE (FROM B28 DAILY TO B45 DAILY) AND REINSTITUTION OF THE RIGHT TO STRIKE. IN ADDITION, SEVERAL STATE ENTERPRISE UNIONS HAVE RESORTED TO ILLEGAL STRIKES AND WORK ACTIONS TO DRAMATIZE THEIR DEMANDS AND FORCE THEIR RESPECTIVE

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MANAGEMENT TO NEGOTIATE. MANY MORE STATE ENTERPRISE UNIONS HAVE SUBMITTED DEMANDS AND THREATEN MORE FORCEFUL ACTION IF MANAGEMENT FAILS TO RESPOND.

17. THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO INCREASED LABOR FERMENT HAS THUS FAR BEEN PRAGMATIC AND RESTRAINED BUT FIRM. KRIANGSAK HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT STRIKES CONTINUE TO BE ILLEGAL. THE PM HAS MANAGED TO DAMPEN CURRENT LABOR UNREST BY AUTHORIZING SOME CONCESSIONS AND AGREEING TO CONSIDER OTHERS. HOWEVER, IN THE LONG RUN, THE PM FACES A DIFFICULT PROBLEM IN SATISFYING LABOR WHILE BALANCING OTHER POLITICAL INTERESTS. ON THE ONE HAND THE PM HAS WORKED HARD TO DEVELOP LABOR SUPPORT, WHICH HE CONSIDERS IMPORTANT TO HIS POLITICAL FUTURE, AND WANTS TO APPEAR CONCERNED AND FORTHCOMING TOWARD LABOR'S REASONABLE DEMANDS. ON THE OTHER HAND, MAJOR CONCESSIONS COULD STIMULATE MORE DEMANDS AND, GIVEN LABOR'S PENT UP FRUSTRATION AND GENERAL EXCITABILITY, POSSIBLY ESCALATE OUT OF CONTROL. SUCH UNREST COULD BE USED BY KRIANGSAK'S CONSERVATIVE OPPONENTS, ESPECIALLY IN THE MILITARY, TO DISCREDIT HIS ADMINISTRATION AND TO CHALLENGE HIS LEADERSHIP ABILITY. MOREOVER, WIDESPREAD WAGE CONCESSIONS COULD EXACERBATE ALREADY STRONG INFLATIONARY PRESSURES TO THE DETRIMENT OF OVERALL RTG ECONOMIC POLICY AND EXCITE STRONG OPPOSITION AMONG POWERFUL BUSINESS INTERESTS.

18. EXTERNAL RELATIONS - GENERAL KRIANGSAK HAS HAD LONG

EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD OF FOREIGN RELATIONS. HIS NEARLY 20 YEARS OF SERVICE AT SUPREME COMMAND FREQUENTLY INVOLVED HIM IN DECISIONS AFFECTING THAI FOREIGN POLICY AND INTRODUCED HIM TO A VARIETY OF FOREIGN LEADERS. EVEN DURING THE PERIOD OF THE THANIN GOVERNMENT, KRIANGSAK EXERCISED SOME INFLUENCE ON FOREIGN POLICY, ALTHOUGH HE WAS UNABLE TO CHECK THANIN'S UNBENDING AND VERY VOCAL CRITICISM OF COMMUNISM AND ITS ADHERENTS. FRUSTRATION WITH THANIN'S EVIDENT INABILITY TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THAILAND'S COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS WAS
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AMONG THE MOTIVES LEADING KRIANGSAK TO ADVOCATE REPLACEMENT OF THE THANIN GOVERNMENT. NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS WITH THE INDOCHINESE COMMUNISTS WAS ONE OF KRIANGSAK'S FIRST FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES WHEN HE TOOK OFFICE.

19. SINCE KRIANGSAK ASSUMED OFFICE THERE HAS BEEN PROGRESS IN NORMALIZING RELATIONS WITH THE INDOCHINESE STATES. RELATIONS WERE NORMALIZED WITH THE SRV WITH THE OPENING OF AN SRV EMBASSY IN BANGKOK FEBRUARY 28. A THAI DELEGATION IS IN HANOI TO MAKE PREPARATIONS FOR OPENING AN RTG EMBASSY IN VIET-NAM. HOANG BAN SON ARRIVED IN BANGKOK APR 19 AS FIRST SRV AMBASSADOR TO BANGKOK. IN RELATIONS WITH PHNOM PENH, FONMIN UPPADIT VISITED CAMBODIA IN LATE JANUARY, REACHING AGREEMENT TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS, INCLUDING RESTORATION OF TRADE AND POSSIBLY BY EARLY SUMMER, TO OPEN EMBASSIES. DESPITE THESE PROSPECTS, THAI-CAMBODIAN RELATIONS ARE STILL PLAGUED BY BORDER INCIDENTS. RESIDENT THAI AND LAO AMBASSADORS ARE NOW PRESENT IN THE RESPECTIVE CAPITALS. ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE, LAO PRIME MINISTER KAYSONE PHOUMVIHAN ISSUED A BLISTERING ATTACK IN MARCH, FALSELY ALLEGING THAT U.S. BASES HAD BEEN REOPENED IN THAILAND. HOWEVER, THE ATMOSPHERE IN LAO-THAI RELATIONS IMPROVED CONSIDERABLY DURING A VISIT IN LATE MARCH TO BANGKOK BY LAO DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUN SIPASEUT. THE AMBER ONE AIR ROUTE FROM THAILAND ACROSS LAOS AND VIET-NAM TO HONG KONG REOPENED OFFICIALLY MARCH 23 FOR ALL AIRLINES EXCEPT PAN AM, CHINA AIRLINES AND KOREAN AIRLINES. THE LATTER HAS RECEIVED TACTI APPROVAL TO FLY THE ROUTE USING THAI INTERNATIONAL CALL SIGNS WHICH IN ITSELF IS A CLEAR INDICATION OF IMPROVED THAI-VIET-NAMESE RELATIONS.

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20. SUBSTANTIAL AS THE PROGRESS HAS BEEN IN IMPROVING THAI RELATIONS WITH THE INDOCHINA COUNTRIES, THE IMPROVEMENT IS STILL LARGELY ON THE SURFACE, AND RELATIONSHIPS CAN DETERIORATE QUICKLY. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS ARE NOT AN END IN THEMSELVES BUT A POTENTIAL MEANS TO THE END OF HARMONIZING THAI AND INDOCHINESE NATIONAL INTERESTS. IN THE CURRENT SITUATION IN INDOCHINA THIS WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT TO DO.

21. IN KEEPING WITH RECENT PRIME MINISTERAL PRACTICE, KRIANGSAK MADE VISITS TO FELLOW ASEAN MEMBER STATES OF FIRST
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PRIORITY BEFORE VENTURING FURTHER FROM HOME. ON FEB 17-28 HE AND A LARGE ENTOURAGE VISITED SINGAPORE, INDONESIA, THE PHILIPPINES AND MALAYSIA. ALTHOUGH THE GENERAL WAS REPORTEDLY DISPLEASED WITH INDONESIAN RELUCTANCE TO MAKE SECURITY COMMITMENTS, THE SWING THROUGH THE AREA WAS PRIMARILY A GOOD WILL JOURNEY AND AS SUCH WAS JUDGED A SUCCESS. SEVERAL ASEAN DIPLOMATS STATIONED HERE HAVE REFLECTED THEIR GOVERNMENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS KRIANGSAK BY EXPRESSING RELIEF AT

THE ADVENT TO OFFICE OF A THAI PRIME MINISTER WHO IS A LESS VOCAL OPPONENT TO COMMUNISM, WILLING TO ADOPT A MORE FLEXIBLE APPROACH IN DEALING WITH INTERNAL DISSENT AS WELL AS EXTERNAL RELATIONS. KRIANGSAK WAS WARMLY RECEIVED BY THE ASEAN STATES AND TREATED AS A MORE PERMANENT FIXTURE ON THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN POLITICAL SCENE THAN HIS EXPLICITLY INTERIM APPOINTMENTS AS PRIME MINISTER WOULD INDICATE.

22. MORE AMBITIOUS WAS KRIANGSAK'S MARCH 29-APRIL 4 TRIP TO CHINA, THE FIRST BY A THAI PRIME MINISTER SINCE KHUKRIT'S JOURNEY SOON AFTER DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WERE ESTABLISHED IN 1975. OBVIOUSLY PLEASED WITH THE RECEPTION ACCORDED HIM, KRIANGSAK EMPHASIZED HIS SATISFACTION WITH THE CHINESE WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT ASEAN'S ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY CONCEPT. ALTHOUGH BILATERAL AGREEMENTS REACHED DURING THE VISIT ON TRADE AND TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC CO-OPERATION WERE OF NOMINAL IMPORTANCE, THE VISIT PRODUCED AN ATMOSPHERE OF FRIENDSHIP AND RECONCILIATION MUCH IN CONTRAST WITH THE COOL PERIOD OF THANIN'S ASCENDANCY. KRIANGSAK IS NOW ANXIOUS TO RECEIVE AN INVITATION FROM THE U.S. TO BALANCE HIS CHINA TRIP AND IS REPORTEDLY HOPEFUL THAT HE CAN VISIT AMERICA BEFORE MAKING AN ANTICIPATED TRIP TO MOSCOW.

23. NEXT ON THE LIST OF JOURNEYS ABROAD, HOWEVER, WILL BE ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT -- BURMA. KRIANGSAK'S INVOLVE-
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MENT WITH AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS BURMA AND ITS DISSIDENT ELEMENTS PERHAPS EPITOMISE THAILAND'S DILEMMA IN DEALING WITH THIS PARTICULAR NEIGHBOR. THE RTG IS TORN BETWEEN A DESIRE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE GUB AND YET NOT ANTAGONIZE THOSE BURMESE DISSIDENT FORCES WHICH ARE IN OPEN CONFLICT WITH RANGOON BUT HAVE LONG BEEN VIEWED BY THE RTG AS A BUFFER AGAINST COMMUNIST INSURGENTS IN NORTHEASTERN BURMA. KRIANGSAK GENUINELY WISHES TO IMPROVE THAI RELATIONS WITH BURMA, AND IT IS APPARENT THAT SENIOR BURMESE LEADERS LIKE HIM AND MAY ACCEPT HIS GOOD INTENTIONS. BURMESE LEADERS ARE CLEARLY SKEPTICAL AS TO WHETHER KRIANGSAK CAN CARRY OTHER THAI LEADERS WITH HIM IN TAKING EFFECTIVE ACTION TO IMPROVE THAI-BURMESE RELATIONS. FOR HIS PART, KRIANGSAK HOPES TO USE HIS GOOD PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH BURMESE LEADERS TO MOVE TO BETTER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

24. POLITICAL SITUATION AND KRIANGSAK'S ROLE - KRIANGSAK'S POSITION AS PRIME MINISTER WILL NOT BE AFFECTD BY HIS PROSPECTIVE RETIREMENT FROM THE THAI MILITARY IN SEPTEMBER. APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER BY ROYAL DECREE, HE HAS SAID THAT HE PLANS TO REMAIN IN OFFICE UNTIL ELECTIONS ARE HELD AND A NEW GOVERNMENT IS FORMED, BASED ON THE NEW CON-
SITUATION. STEPS REQUIRED TO BE TAKEN BEFORE NATIONAL

ELECTIONS CAN BE HELD INVOLVE COMPLETION OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION (STILL BEFORE THE CONSTITUTION DRAFTING COMMITTEE), APPROVAL OF THE CONSTITUTION BY THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, APPROVAL OF AN ELECTIONS LAW INCLUDING FIXING OF THE DATE BY THE ASSEMBLY, AND THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN ITSELF. THIS PROMISES TO BE A LENGTHY PROCESS. THE GOVERNMENT APPOINTED THE CONSTITUTION DRAFTING COMMITTEE AND HAS BEEN EXERTING INFLUENCE ON THE COMMITTEE TO ENSURE A LARGER CONSTITUTIONAL ROLE IN THE MILITARY IN THE RTG THAN WAS THE CASE DURING THE DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT IN 1973-76. WHETHER SUCH AN EXPANDED ROLE FOR THE MILITARY WILL INVOLVE MEASURES TO ENSURE THAT A MILITARY OFFICER (OR A RECENTLY-RETIRED OFFICER) IS PRIME MINISTER IS NOT YET CLEAR.

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25. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM IS THAT AT SOME TIME IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS KRIANGSAK WILL NEED TO ENTER INTO A POLITICAL PARTY OF SOME SORT TO ESTABLISH A BASE TO CONTINUE AS PRIME MINISTER AFTER HE HAS RETIRED FROM MILITARY SERVICE. RETIRED AIR MARSHAL THAWI CHUNLASAP, WHO WAS LEADER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY IN 1967-77, HAS OFFERED TO ORGANIZE A POLITICAL PARTY AROUND KRIANGSAK. SOCIAL JUSTICE WAS A SHAPELESS PARTY MADE UP OF A VARIETY OF DISPARATE ELEMENTS, BUT IT WAS ONE OF THE FOUR LARGEST PARTIES IN THE ELECTIONS OF 1976. FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE INFLUENTIAL, MILITARY-ORIENTED THAI NATION PARTY UNTIL THE 1976 COUP, HAS RECENTLY INDICATED PUBLICLY THAT HE WAS NO LONGER INTERESTED IN POLITICS AND HAS SUGGESTED THAT KRIANGSAK REMAIN IN OFFICE FOR SEVERAL MORE YEARS. THERE IS THUS SOME QUESTION AS TO WHETHER THE THAI NATION PARTY WILL TAKE PART IN THE ELECTIONS. CONCEIVABLY, A POLITICAL GROUPING MADE UP OF ELEMENTS OF THE OLD SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THAI NATION PARTIES, PLUS PERHAPS SOME LABOR SUPPORT, MIGHT SERVE AS A POLITICAL BASE FOR KRIANGSAK.

26. HOWEVER, THAILAND'S STRONGEST POLITICAL GROUP IS PROBABLY STILL THE DEMOCRAT PARTY, WHICH CONTINUES TO EXHIBIT SIGNS OF VITALITY DESPITE THE FORMAL BAN ON POLITICAL PARTIES DECREED IN OCT, 1976. IT IS NOW ALMOST CERTAIN THAT FORMER PRIME MINISTER SENI PRAMOT WILL NO LONGER BE DEMOCRAT LEADER AND THEREFORE A CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER. FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHAIRATTAKUN SEEMS TO BE TAKING THIS PARTY IN HAND AND COULD PROBABLY TURN IN A FORMIDABLE PERFORMANCE IN AN ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN. IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT KRIANGSAK, USING A CATCH-ALL POLITICAL GROUPING OF THE KIND OUTLINED ABOVE, COULD DO BETTER THAN THE DEMOCRATS. WITH ITS MODERATELY REFORMIST OUTLOOK AND COMMITMENT TO

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PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE
DEMOCRATS TO FORM A COALITION WITH KRIANGSAK.

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 INR-05 L-01 CIAE-00 NSAE-00
NSC-05 SP-02 OMB-01 PM-03 EB-04 PA-01 ICA-01
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R 190955Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3264
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
CINCPAC HONOLULU
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 5 OF 5 BANGKOK 11275

LIMDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT CORRECTED)

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD AND COMIPAC

27. THAILAND IS A HIGHLY CONSERVATIVE COUNTRY WITH COR-
RESPONDINGLY CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL GROUPINGS, APART FROM
THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND. THE DEMOCRAT, THAI NATION,
AND SOCIAL JUSTICE GROUPS REFERRED TO ABOVE ARE MODERATELY
CONSERVATIVE. HOWEVER, THERE IS ALSO A FAR-RIGHT, CONSERVA-
TIVE ELEMENT, IN WHICH THE NAWAPHON (NEW STRENGTH) MOVEMENT
IS THE MOST PROMINENT. THE NAWAPHON GROUP, ESTABLISHED IN
1974, AND FORMALLY DISSOLVED IN 1976 WITH OTHER POLITICAL

GROUPINGS, CONTINUES A SHADOWY FORM OF ACTIVITY, EVEN CON-
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DUCTING FOREIGN CONTACTS (WITH THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND WITH ANTI-COMMUNIST CAMBODIAN RESISTANCE ELEMENTS). NAWAPHON'S PRINCIPAL LEADER, WATTHANA KHIEWIMOH, HAS BROUGHT A NUMBER OF VERY CONSERVATIVE ACTIVE AND RETIRED MILITARY AND POLICE OFFICERS TO SUPPORT HIM. HE IS A COMPULSIVE NAME DROPPER, BUT HOW MUCH POLITICAL INFLUENCE HE CAN BRING TO BEAR IN A MORE OPEN POLITICAL SYSTEM IS NOT CLEAR. NAWAPHON SET UP THE DHAMMATHIPPATAI PARTY TO CONTEST THE ELECTIONS OF APRIL 1976, BUT DID NOT SUCCEED IN ELECTING ANY MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

28. THERE IS ALWAYS THE POSSIBILITY THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WILL NOT BE HELD BY APRIL, 1979, AS PROVIDED FOR IN THE INTERIM CONSTITUTION AND FREQUENTLY PROMISED BY THE THAI MILITARY SINCE THE COUP OF OCTOBER 1977. PUTTING OFF THE ELECTIONS OR, IN ANOTHER FORMULATION, HOLDING A REFERENDUM ON WHETHER TO HOLD ELECTIONS, WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO DO. THE PUBLIC OUTCRY AGAINST A CANCELLATION OF ELECTIONS OR AN OBVIOUS ATTEMPT TO AVOID THEM WOULD BE SUBSTANTIAL, IN VIEW OF THE REPEATED STATEMENTS MADE BY MILITARY LEADERS, INCLUDING PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK, THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD. NEVERTHELESS, MANY THAI POLITICAL FIGURES DOUBT THAT ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD SOON AND SOME EXHIBIT RELIEF AT THE PROSPECT. THE VIEW THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WILL SOMEHOW BE AVOIDED IS ALSO WIDELY EXPRESSED AMONG THAI BUSINESSMEN, WHO REMEMBER ALL TOO CLEARLY THE CONFUSING AND VOLATILE PERIOD OF THE THAI DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT FROM 1973 TO 1976 AND WHO CLEARLY DO NOT WISH TO REPEAT IT.

29. WE ASSUME THAT KRIANGSAK WISHES TO CONTINUE IN OFFICE AS PRIME MINISTER. HOWEVER, FOR HIM TO REMAIN AS PRIME MINISTER WOULD APPEAR TO REQUIRE EITHER INDEFINITE POSTPONEMENT OR OTHER AVOIDANCE OF ELECTIONS, THE FORMATION OF
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A VERY BROAD COALITION OF PARTIES OF WHICH HE WOULD SOMEHOW BE THE ACKNOWLEDGED LEADER, OR SOME CONSTITUTIONAL LEGERDEMAIN PERPETUATING HIMSELF IN OFFICE. IN A PRESS INTERVIEW IN HONG KONG IN EARLY APRIL KRIANGSAK REFERRED TO HIMSELF AS A "NEW POLITICIAN", THOUGH HE ALSO REFERRED TO HIMSELF AS PRIMARILY A "MILITARY MAN". KRIANGSAK'S POLITICAL PLANS HAVE NOT YET BEEN MADE CLEAR. THE MOST THAT CAN BE SAID IS THAT IT IS BY NO MEANS CLEAR WHETHER OR HOW

KRIANGSAK WILL MANAGE CONTINUING IN OFFICE AS PRIME MINISTER
A YEAR FROM NOW.

30. CONCLUSION - DURING HIS FIRST SIX MONTHS IN EFFECTIVE
POWER PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK HAS MANAGED TO KEEP HIS SEAT
IN A DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION IN WHICH HE HAS DEMONSTRATED
MORE MANEUVERING SKILL THAN POWER. HE HAS FACED A DIFFICULT
ECONOMIC SITUATION WHERE RAPID IMPROVEMENT WILL BE EXTREMELY
DIFFICULT. HE HAS MADE A GOOD START IN NORMALIZING THAI-
LAND'S RELATIONS WITH ITS COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS, BUT REAL
IMPROVEMENT WILL BE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE. HE
FACES THE NEED TO ESTABLISH A NEW BASE FOR HIS POSITION,
AFTER HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE THAI MILITARY IN SEPTEMBER,
LOOKING TOWARDS NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN LATE 1978 OR
EARLY 1979 AND A MORE OPEN POLITICAL SITUATION. KRIANGSAK
HAS MADE A GOOD INITIAL IMPRESSION IN HANDLING A COMPLEX PO-
LITICAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION, PRESIDING OVER A GOVERNMENT
IN POWER UNTIL THE ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, THE HONEYMOON PERIOD
IS OVER, AND KRIANGSAK CAN EXPECT CONTINUING PROBLEMS IN
THE ECONOMIC AND LABOR FIELDS. THESE WILL HAVE THEIR IMPACT
ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION, JUST AT THE TIME WHEN THE ELEC-
TIONS CAMPAIGN IS OPENING UP. THE SECOND SIX MONTHS FOR
THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT PROMISE TO BE MORE CHALLENGING
THAN THE FIRST SIX MONTHS.
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